

THE BLUE BOOKLETS—1

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# THE FALLACIES OF SPIRITUALISM

A. LEONARD SUMMERS

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# The Fallacies of Spiritualism

*A Survey of Recent Claims and Pretensions*

BY  
A. LEONARD SUMMERS



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# The Fallacies of Spiritualism

## I

### THE GROWTH OF THE "CRAZE"

WE have for some time past been experiencing, particularly in Great Britain and America, a perfect "boom" of spiritualism. An amazing wave of enthusiasm for the occult has spread over the length and breadth of the land, and so-called spiritualistic séances at which astounding phenomena take place are of almost daily occurrence. Newspapers that formerly never thought the subject worthy of attention now devote columns to the records of alleged remarkable psychic phenomena, to the reporting of séances, to controversy on the subject, and so on.

The literature of spiritualism is increasing by leaps and bounds, and we have had numerous volumes from the pens of notable people in various spheres of activity containing startling and fantastic stories of manifestations through "mediums"—volumes which, if merely on account of the eminence and distinction of the writers, must cause the ordinary man to pause and think.

Following the lead set by Sir Oliver Lodge in his book "Raymond," there have recently issued from the press, by some curious law of imitation, a number of works purporting



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to be the faithful records of communications with relatives who have passed that bourne from whence, we were formerly instructed to believe, "no traveller returns."

Alleged occult "happenings" have been much more frequent of recent years than they ever used to be, or, at any rate, if this is not so, the widespread interest in such occurrences and in psychic phenomena generally shown by an insufficiently instructed public, has led to their looming more and more prominently in our public life and our daily discussions, in the press, the pulpit, and on the platform.

One writer on the "growing belief in the occult" wrote recently :

Everywhere there is a great and fast spreading growth of belief in the occult. It takes various forms in different countries, and with different individuals. I was speaking not long ago to a well-known story-writer, who told me that, though he had never hitherto believed in the existence of spirits or ghost-raising, he was now half way to belief. He had been to a séance at Preston quite unexpectedly and was unknown to anybody there except to a friend who had persuaded him to attend. Also he was a sceptic, and when asked whom he would like to see, he replied, with an incredulous smile, 'My mother.'

He told me his mother's spirit appeared and spoke to him, mentioning something that no one but he and she had known. He was so upset that he has never attempted any experience of the kind since.

The writer goes on to speak of an old Cornish superstition relating to what is described as the "calling of the sea" when some tragedy is about to happen. There was a big ground

swell off the Cornish coast during the Great War, and a day or two later came the news of the great slaughter and retreat from St. Quentin at a part of the line where there was a large number of Cornish troops.

This supposed supernatural event had led to a great crudescence of superstition in Cornwall—where, however, certain superstitions have always been rife.

We have perhaps not far to seek for the reasons for this great and feverish interest in "the world beyond." The mighty upheaval of minds and accepted conditions that was produced by the limitless catastrophe of the Great War was bound to result in searchings and questionings. Earnest and sincere minds wanted to know the why and wherefore of these terrible events. If we were living in a well-ordered world where cause and effect succeeded as sunset does sunrise, there must be some reason for such a reversal of order, for such a cataclysm. Minds were groping in the dark for something to seize on.

In ordinary times, death comes into families and communities nearly always as a calamity, but with a regular order and logical sequence, relentless as the passing of the years. But now death came wildly and plucked at the sturdiest and most promising blossoms in life's garden, sweeping away in the most reckless manner the fondest hopes of thousands of families.

Many found it hard to believe their senses. They sought for some voice, some sign that this was not all—was not the end. Surely the words of the poet :

There was a door to which I found no key ;  
There was a veil past which I could not see—

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were not to be taken as definitely final. If we were living in a God-loving world, there must be something more, and there must be some reason for this sacrifice of people and nations. Who could tell them? Who could open the dark door?

So with that restless spirit which the age has produced, minds turned to spiritualism, which professed to give a more immediate and more satisfying answer than the churches to the great question—the most portentous of all questions— What is there beyond?

If spiritualism could answer this question, then indeed would it be an ineffable balm and blessing to mankind.

What, then, has spiritualism so far told us? What has been its reply to the mighty query? Has it given us anything on which we can place reliance, or make for ourselves promises rather than vague hopes? Has it, in fact, really done any of those things which it professed to do?

These are the points which we intend to examine in the following pages, analysing critically but calmly and fairly the pretensions put forward by the professors of this "cult." Does spiritualism contain the nucleus of a new science, or is it merely a jumble of superstitions founded on the uncontrolled and uncontrollable workings of the mind and easily-explained psychic phenomena?

No question discussed by mankind is so interesting, but none also is so fraught with difficulties, none so surrounded and honeycombed with pitfalls.

The very talents, sincere though they be, of some of the leading disciples of the "cult," open the door to its greatest dangers.

The late Ella Wheeler Wilcox, in a preface she wrote

to a small and interesting book on alleged spiritualistic experiences from the pen of a very remarkable woman, said that everyone must needs respect the opinions and statements of Mrs. Arthur Inkersley. This is undoubtedly true, but it is an attitude with which the world *cannot afford to mislead itself*.

That one should have respect for the opinions and statements of this lady, of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the Rev. Vale Owen, Sir Oliver Lodge, and others who have sought to lead the public mind through the mazes of this subject, advances the truly inquiring mind very little farther. *In a domain where there are no landmarks—in a region that has never been charted, there can be no guides or leaders.*

The eminent people we have mentioned are *merely their own advocates*. We can respect their sincerity and earnestness, but can we rely upon their sense of judgment, their critical faculty? Are we sure that they are capable of properly weighing the evidence of their own senses? The mere fact that a man is a distinguished imaginative writer is, indeed, a danger. A person's very longing for communication with beloved relatives who have gone, is apt to sap his or her trustworthiness. No man can guide us in considerations where there are no real standards. In a subject of this importance the public cannot be convinced by mere assertions.

## CHAPTER II

### SOME PERTINENT QUESTIONS

WRITING in a London newspaper some time back, a member of the Society of Authors challenged Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Oliver Lodge, and other of the "high priests" of spiritualism, to reply to the following questions. They are questions, however we regard the matter, which go to the very roots of spiritualistic pretensions, and yet there has never been any effort or attempt to answer them on the part of those who profess to tell us what the "other world" is like.

What really is a "spirit?" How is it possible to know one and to understand whether it is the real thing or not?

Has a spirit a conscience or a soul?

Why is it necessary to get into communication with spirits through "mediums," more especially when these are mostly anything but well educated?

Why must spirits and mediums have darkness?

How is it possible to know an honest medium from a dishonest one?

Why do spirits as a rule require tambourines, musical boxes, etc., to play with?

Are mundane languages also the languages of the spirit world—and why? If not, how is it that spirits speak in these languages and do not attempt to teach us theirs?

Why do spirits wear clothes? Clothes, too, identical in

material and fashion with those on earth? How is the material obtained? Why do spirits have similar foods and drinks to those on earth? How are these obtained?

Why do spirits always talk about themselves and their mundane lives?

Why, in the spirit world, judging from conversations reported, should costermongers still be costermongers, Red Indians still Red Indians, and village idiots still village idiots, and so on?

Why should spirits, according to revelations, live what is practically an imitation of mundane existence? Why be permitted a memory of this world and the life here?

If the next life is a step onwards, why cannot spirits tell us of the different conditions there? Their spiritual senses do not appear one iota in advance.

Has any nation or race ever adopted spiritualism as a religion, or part of a religion, with success?

If Christianity adopted spiritualism as part of its religion, what benefits would this confer on this world, apart from helping hordes of charlatans to prosper?

Although sex is necessary on this earth, why is it necessary in the spirit world?

Why should, and how can physical relationship on this earth be extended to and continued in the spirit world? How can mothers and sons here be mothers and sons there? If this is so, is motherhood here a dual rôle producing the mundane son and the spirit son? Again, what were these spirits before the physical life and relationship down here? They cannot have been the same mothers and sons then surely?

Is the spirit world the next and final phase? But as the spirit is immortal, must we not have been in the spirit world before we got on this earth? So, if we go back, don't we

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return also? Does not this mean an endless alternation of mundane and spiritual existences. If so *cui bono*?

How is it that *spirits have never any communications to make that will benefit and advance mankind*? Therefore, as spirits are of no practical use or benefit to mankind on the earth, why should we wish to get into touch with them?

Leaders of "spiritualistic" movements cannot dismiss these questions as of no importance or not bearing on the subject. If spiritualism is to be of any use to humanity, nay, if it has any foundation of truth in it, questions like these are of supreme importance and should rule our investigations. If spirits or spiritualism can tell us anything about our life and conditions here and hereafter, the public wish to know it and have a right to know it. Otherwise a sceptical world cannot be converted to a belief in mediumistic phenomena, whoever the professors may be.

If we have to set aside considerations like these as irrelevant, and assume spiritualism to be merely an amusement, then it is a most harmful and dangerous amusement, as is evidenced by the fate of many who had given themselves up to a belief in it.

## CHAPTER III

### MEDIUMS

THE great stumbling block that prevents very many enquiring but discerning people from accepting the contentions of spiritualism is the medium—that inevitable, indispensable accessory to all psychic functions. No phenomena, no materialisations, can take place without the medium, and thus this personage is *per se* unquestionably a barrier to any progress in spiritualistic attainments, since all experiences must be *made second hand*, and also—and this is not the least objection—on account of the obvious opportunity for fraud.

Why, the common-sense enquirer asks, if departed spirits wish to or are willing to communicate with those on earth, can they not do so directly, instead of through third parties who have nothing to do with the subject of the communications?

If we do not go so far as to make the sweeping statement that all mediums are fraudulent, which would be unfair both to themselves as a body and to those gifted and sincere persons who have had faith in them, yet the fact remains that a very large percentage of these people have been proved to be and convicted of being tricksters; and as for the others, their very position between a strange unknown force, exciting the most hidden and potent of emotions, and their extremely impressionable and nervous highly-strung audiences, opens the



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way not merely to active fraud and tricks, but at the least to passive deception owing to the juggling with forces that are beyond their control.

The mere fact that a medium is usually not a highly educated person and is devoid of trained reasoning faculties, and that he or she—and usually it is a woman—is the centre of the thoughts and aspirations of a body of people who, however emotional they may be, are his or her superiors intellectually, must needs in many cases develop in them a species of cunning that replaces the intellectual deficiency. The medium has to yield up the control of his or her will and become as passive as possible, and this opens up the way to passivity in fraud.

Such a person, not being trained to the analysis and weighing of natural or even slightly "supernatural" phenomena, is not capable of checking little manifestations which may not necessarily amount to fraud, but which, though not rigorously exact, tend to put him or her in the best light as a powerful and successful medium. Let us not forget that most mediums gain their livings by the exercise of their "profession." In nearly all callings where those practising them are not of the very highest intelligence and honourableness, there are little "tricks of the trade"—how much more, therefore, in a calling that appeals and calls for credulity and "gullibility" from the public, and excites the faculties of admiration and wonder.

*But as a matter of fact the exposure of fraudulent mediums is as old as and coeval with spiritualism itself.*

Let us consider a few of the most recent cases.

The periodical called "Light" recently recorded the exposure of a "fake" medium named Christopher Chambers

at a Walthamstow séance. The investigators present forced him to sign a full confession for publication.

Some damaging evidence against mediums was given at the Church Congress held at Southend in October, 1920. Miss Lily Dougall (the report is taken from the "Daily Telegraph" of October 21, 1920) told of her own experiences at two recent sittings arranged for her by the Secretary for Psychical Research. In one case, the medium gave a message from a spirit-man in the dress of a clergyman. She described him correctly, but the only difficulty was that this "spirit" had not yet died. In the second case, the medium was given the name of a young man, and was asked what had become of him. The medium gave details which ought to have been interesting and touching to anyone who knew the family; but as a fact, they lived only in fiction, and the young man was the leading character in Miss Dougall's first novel, written many years ago.

In September, 1920, an action was brought in the New York courts against a medium named Mrs. Mabelle Hiron, for the recovery of 12,400 dollars alleged to have been obtained by "spiritualistic means" from Doctor J. B. Hubbell, of Rockville, Maryland. Dr. Hubbell declared that after the death of Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, to whom he had been secretary, it was intended to erect a memorial to that lady, towards which he proposed contributing 12,400 dollars of his own money, including 900 dollars bequeathed to him by Clara Barton herself. In 1914 he visited Mrs. Hiron, who, he said, went into a trance and gave him a "message" that was supposed to come from Clara Barton and which directed him to give all the money to Mrs.

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Hirons for the memorial. Dr. Hubbell believed the "message" to be genuine and gave her the money, but the memorial was never erected—hence the action.

Mr. Stuart Cumberland gave some amusing demonstrations at the Apollo Theatre, London, in March 1920, which were intended to show up the fraudulent spiritualistic medium—his invitations to be present were, by the way, accepted neither by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle nor the Rev. Vale Owen. At this demonstration the claim of mediums to pass matter through matter "in the fourth dimension" was shown to be completely false. The trick is to slip a ring made of any material on to the sitter's arm while apparently the medium holds both the former's hands. Mr. Cumberland blindfolded the sitter to produce the effect of the dark séance, and made him believe both his hands were held. But only one hand was actually held, the other being left free for the ring to be slipped on. The lecturer also demonstrated how "rappings" can be produced by a slight dislocation of the bones of the feet, and he told his audience of a medium who pretended to be the ghost of Dante, but when the "spirit" trod upon some tintacks purposely spread on the floor for him, "Dante" swore in forcible Cockney.

A medium in Paris just before the war, an American woman, who gave so-called spiritual advice to many well-known people which she professed to receive from a ghostly counsellor whom she called "Dr. C——," could never get her spiritual mentor to speak until the clients had brought presents of expensive fruit. Therefore fruit, whatever fruit was in season, was always to be found on her table at the séances. This woman, who was of very humble extraction

and very uneducated, has not yet, so far as I know, been exposed, but those who did not come within the orbit of her influence always wondered why a "spirit" should need fruit, and what it could do with it. Nor was it ever shown that the fruit disappeared in any but the ordinary manner known to all healthy living human beings. This woman had a strange compelling eye with which she undoubtedly hypnotised many people; those who did not come under her influence she avoided meeting as far as possible, and she would never—probably could not—discuss the subject of her alleged spiritual communications.

In his book, "The Wanderings of a Spiritualist," Sir Arthur Conan Doyle relates an incident in which he confesses he himself was badly duped. During his Australian tour, Sir Arthur's "wanderings" led him to numerous strange séances, some of which he admits were far from satisfactory. But the most unfortunate, for the cause of the propaganda of spiritualistic manifestations, was that in which he experimented with a man named Bailey, an alleged "rapport medium who produced actual articles from far lands." Among such articles said to have been produced by Bailey were some Assyrian tablets, one of which Sir Arthur, when he returned to England, took to the British Museum for expert examination by the authorities. But British Museum experts have impartial judgments and matter-of-fact minds. "It was pronounced to be a forgery, and further inquiry proved that these forgeries are made by certain Jews in a suburb of Bagdad."

Everyone must admire Sir Arthur's sincerity in pursuing the matter so far as to detect fraud and deception in a case that would have so picturesquely aided his contentions, *but do*

*not incidents like this show how easily he and his enthusiastic fellow-believers can be deceived by the tricksters?*

Many people will remember the suit brought in the King's Bench Division by Mr. Percy Thomas Selbit, a "theatrical agent and illusionist," who was awarded £200 damages and costs by Mr. Justice Darling in what was called the "Medium in a Mask" case. At a séance attended by several prominent spiritualists, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Lady Glenconner, the medium completely deceived the enthusiasts by her performance, which Lady Glenconner was reported to have described as "very convincing" a performance which Mr. Selbit *admitted during the hearing of the case in Court to be all "spoof."* One of the investigators, a journalist named Rogers, who was present at the Criterion Restaurant during the "Medium in the Mask" séance, declared he "considered it was a frost from beginning to end." He described how he used a flash lamp on the "ghost," to the great embarrassment of those in the plot, one of whom was heard to warn the "spirit" to "come back quickly" out of the incriminating light.

In summing up the case, Mr Justice Darling remarked, "There are two camps. There are those who believe that spirits come and communicate with those they have known, through some medium. Their time is so little occupied in the next world, or it is such a dreary place, that they are perfectly ready to come to the Criterion Theatre and attend matinées, which I think ought to be one of the chief punishments, if there be a place of punishment. These spirits are ready to attend manifestations and not be mere lookers-on; they are ready to count the pennies in overcoats and to read a

jumble of German and English nonsense—and this is the life the spirits lead! There are, on the other hand, those who apparently are incapable of supposing that this is the sort of life imposed on those who have ceased to exist on earth. And if the former opinion is true, well may we weep for the friends who have died!”

It has often been suggested that a sound test for spiritualists professing the power of communicating with the departed would be that they should get into touch *with the spirits of Miss Shore and others who have recently been murdered, and try to solve the mystery as to who murdered them.* But such practical advice never seems to appeal to spiritualists.

One of the most damning indictments of the medium is that given by Mr. Arthur Prince, the well-known ventriloquist and entertainer. Coming from a man who has travelled far and seen much, who went to spiritual séances with a receptive mind and was bitterly disillusioned, this warning cannot be ignored. This is what he publicly declared:—

Twenty years ago, sorrowing at the death of one I held dear, I was induced to seek consolation at a spiritualistic séance. The wish to establish rapport between myself and my dead friend lured me to many sittings, and I derived great comfort from the messages I was assured had been sent from the one I had lost. I became an ardent devotee. I felt I had discovered the truth of life and the mysteries of death. That others could not easily believe what I told them I had seen and heard hurt me. I wanted to convert the whole world!

At the same time I was studying magic as a means of earning my bread and butter. In my business I was known as a good showman. At the game of bluff, as an entertainer,

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I could hold my own. But it did not occur to me that, while I was bluffing the public from the stage, I was being similarly bluffed at the séance. But I had not yet plumbed the depths of dishonour to which cupidity and greed can drag my fellow men and women.

The particular medium I patronised seemed to be a straight man, and it was his voice that predominated in the hymn-singing at the circle. UNCONSCIOUSLY I BEGAN TO DELUDE MYSELF! When our medium spoke of spirit presences, I began to experience all manner of creepy-crawly sensations. Gradually I lost my sense of proportion, and my logic became warped by fantasy. During this period my health suffered, and I became a physical wreck. I was NEARLY DRIVEN CRAZY by insomnia, I became dyspeptic, and my business ability as a performer declined through atrophy. As the Americans say, I was qualifying for the Bughouse Ward.

At last came the cruel awakening. I was one of a circle presided over by the clever medium. We were instructed to place our hands on a huge dining-room table. Suddenly it began to move bodily into the air! For several seconds it hovered in space. The lights were all up, and it certainly seemed that supernatural forces were at work. When the table settled once more on the floor, I turned in my enthusiasm to congratulate the medium. I shook his hand, and oh! the soul-sickening discovery! ATTACHED TO HIS ARM WAS A STRONG METAL HOOK, PADDED TO PREVENT NOISE, AND PAINTED FLESH-COLOUR IN CASE OF MOMENTARY EXPOSURE. While his hand was on the table, the hook was gripping the table-top from underneath. Obviously the medium's vis-a-vis was an accomplice, and had a similar attachment.

I kept my discovery to myself, and determined on winnowing the real from the false. My experience leads

me only to confirmed scepticism of spiritualistic phenomena in all its phases. One by one the phenomena of the circle have proved to be fakes, some simple, others complex and demanding the skill of an accomplished conjurer. For over twenty years I have been on the track of necromancers, both here and in the States and Canada, and have been the means of bringing many tricksters to justice. DURING TWENTY YEARS OF CONSCIENTIOUS INVESTIGATION I HAVE NOT ENCOUNTERED ONE GENUINE INSTANCE OF SPIRITUALISTIC MANIFESTATION. While in America I discovered that a secret society of mediums existed. During the war that secret society has drawn this country within its orbit.

Circulated among the members of the mediums' secret society there is a blue-book of valuable information compiled under the direction of an arch-fiend whose sinister spell is rapidly spreading all over the world. Wealthy victims are passed along from medium to medium and systematically defrauded. The machinations of this arch-medium embrace market rigging, political intrigue, and Press publicity. Imagine the possibilities of the organisation !

If you must attend séances, go with your eyes well opened, and—above all—BEWARE OF MEDIUMS !

As to the reliability of the *average spiritualists*, or the value of their evidence, we find very many of them utterly unreliable and erratic. I recall one well-known lady spiritualist of the present day who is hysterical, excessively emotional, super-imaginative, and neurotic. She suffers in ordinary life from hallucinations, is devoid of memory and in everyday matters has a very loose conscience. She is prone to accuse people of robbing her, and has been known to call at a dozen shops that she had previously visited to look for a missing bag



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or umbrella, only to discover on her return home that she had not even taken it out. At nights she will wander about the house opening doors and windows and knocking articles down, uttering moans and screams, while in the mornings she has often appeared bearing deep nail scratches on her face and neck for which she cannot account.

Yet this woman is accepted by her fellow spiritualists as an authority !

The pathetic poison drama at Streatham, in the autumn of 1921, shows the state of mind to which spiritualists can be brought. The members of that family were described by a witness as "cranky on spiritualism"—and *no fewer than four of them agreed to take poison !*

In December, 1921, a prominent singer, Enrico Vannucini, and his sister were arrested at Florence (says a Rome Press Agent), on the charge of obtaining large sums of money and valuable presents from a woman by *suggestion during spirit séances*. Vannucini's sister became friendly with the woman, a wealthy widow, representing herself as a "gifted medium," organised séances, at which the spirit of the woman's late husband ordered her to buy a country house and other things for the Vannucinis. The widow sold her jewels at a great loss to a friend of the Vannucini's, and so reduced her fortune that she had to borrow money from her sister, who charged the Vannucinis with fraud.

A Mrs. Ada Robbins, of Iowa, was so convinced that she was hoaxed by spiritualists who, fourteen months previously, placed a baby in her arms with the assurance that it was her own daughter brought back to life, that she announced her willingness to restore the child to the rightful mother. Her

faith in spiritualism collapsed when a medium besought her to buy sixteen necklaces for her, saying she had to "materialise" that number at a hurried séance and was not equal to the task !

## IV

### SO-CALLED GLIMPSES OF THE "OTHER WORLD"

#### I—SIR A. CONAN DOYLE.

Can any serious and thinking person, with the best will in the world, blindly accept the theories and claims put forward by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in his book "The Vital Message?"

Sweeping assertions and advanced opinions such as he makes do much to discredit the whole problem and throw ridicule upon it. They cannot convert a single sceptic; they can only arouse laughter in those who, having reasoning faculties, and knowing that man has sought to solve this riddle ever since he existed, see people come forward like self-elected Popes and declare, without anything tangible to go upon, that *they know all about it!*

What we have both in mind and character, Sir Arthur writes, we carry over with us. No man is too old to learn, for what he learns he keeps. There is no physical side to love, and no child-birth, though there is close union between those married people who really love each other and generally there is deep sympathetic friendship and comradeship between the sexes. Every man or woman finds a soul-mate sooner or later. It is a world of sympathy. Only those who have had this tie foregather. The sullen husband, the flighty wife, is no longer there to

plague the innocent spouse. All is sweet and peaceful. It is the long-rest cure after the nerve-strain of life, and before new experiences in the future.

Sir Arthur writes about all this as if he had actually been to the "Life Beyond" which he is supposed to describe. Yet if he had merely gone and lived in another country on this earth—say, France or Siam—it would have taken him, with the limited faculties that the best of men possess, years of residence to find out and be able to make such absolute statements about the life there with such assurance.

How then did Sir Arthur find all this out? Is he sure that he has not been impressed by the declarations contained in some of our good old English hymns or the equally positive assurances of speakers at certain revivalist meetings and simply paraphrased them?

Pleasant, albeit fantastical, as this picture is, the distinguished novelist spoils it, utterly spoils his elevated spiritual atmosphere, by introducing into it base worldly considerations which it must surely be the great object of those who live in a higher sphere to cast off and leave behind. Perhaps Sir Arthur, having enjoyed a more prosperous and congenial life in fortunate worldly surroundings, is more inclined to "hug his earthly chains," less loth to part with them and think no more of them in a "better world" than most of us would be.

"The circumstances are homely and familiar," he tells us. Yet the great bulk of worn and weary mankind have always looked hopefully forward to a complete change.

That is precisely what neither Sir Arthur nor any other of those who profess to tell us of what comes "after" are able

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to describe. The more we read these effusions the more we find they are simply pictures of an idealized life on earth. The imaginations of our "spiritualistic" writers cannot advance any farther. They are—naturally—earthbound. The sublime imaginations of a Dante or a Campanella have no echo in our modern spiritualists where all is earth-earthly.

The circumstances are homely and familiar. Happy circles live in pleasant homesteads, with every amenity of beauty and music. Beautiful gardens, lovely flowers, green woods, pleasant lakes, domestic pets—all of these things are fully described in the messages of the pioneer travellers who have at last got news back to those who loiter in the old dingy home.

But, Sir Arthur, we have these pleasant things on earth. Life would be intolerable if we could not sometimes turn from our worries to "lovely flowers, green woods," and so on. This is no new world which is being described; it is only the observation of one who is looking into a sort of mental camera obscura and describes what he sees projected from the mirror above; it is the old, old world, where the "lovely flowers" have cankers, and trouble frequently enters the "pleasant homesteads" and "beautiful gardens."

There are no poor and no rich. The craftsman may still pursue his task, but he does it for the joy of the work.

Here again there is no change, for there are hundreds of thousands of people on our weary earth who do work for the pleasure of it—though this statement also opens up a vista of endless wasted energy, since even those on earth

who work for the pleasure of working like to find an output for their productions. A sculptor who makes beautiful statues for the pleasure of making them, likes also to find purchasers.

There will be no dull moments in the coming world. It is a place of joy and laughter. There are games and sports of all sorts, though none which cause pain to lower life.

Another transcript from the hymnals evidently! It is quite a comforting assurance and satisfactory to nervous people, but somewhat absurd if we reflect that as we are supposed to be in a higher spiritual life, beyond all suffering and pain, there can be no "lower life" and consequently no possibility of causing pain or even displeasure.

Food and drink in the grosser sense do not exist, Sir Arthur continues, but there seems to be the pleasure of taste.

Why is the chronicler doubtful about the sense of taste as his "seems to be" indicates? Does he consider taste a grosser sense than sight or smell or hearing, which must all exist *there* as they do *here*, if there are flowers to see and smell, and music to listen to?

The child grows up to the normal, so that the mother who lost a child of two years old and dies herself twenty years later, finds a grown-up daughter of twenty-two awaiting her coming. Age, which is produced chiefly by the mechanical presence of lime in our arteries, disappears, and the individual reverts to the full normal growth and appearance of completed manhood or womanhood. Let no

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woman mourn her lost beauty and no man his lost strength and weakening brain. It all awaits them once more on the other side. Nor is any deformity or bodily weakness there, for all is normal and at its best. . . The same applies to all birthmarks, deformities, blindness, and other imperfections. None of them is permanent, and all will vanish in that happier life that awaits us. . . Every earthly thing has its equivalent. Scoffers have guffawed over alcohol and tobacco, but if all things were reproduced, it would be a flaw if these were not reproduced also. That they should be abused as they are here, would indeed be evil tidings.

Can anything be more illogical or absurd as a picture of the conditions that human beings will meet with in the "hereafter?" If a girl "grows" there to the age of twenty-two, what is there to prevent her growing to fifty-two, sixty-two and seventy-two, whether there be lime in the arteries or not? Is there any particularly celestial virtue in the age of twenty-two rather than eighteen or twenty-four? There must be lime in the arteries to grow to twenty-two—and yet twenty-two is not "completed manhood or womanhood." And, after all, time as we know it can only be reckoned by earth-standards.

After telling us that "food and drink in the grosser sense do not exist"—though there is only one sense to both these very normal actions on our mundane sphere—he persists in the grotesque notion that the spiritual world, in spite of sublime aspirations and the spiritual atmosphere, still finds it congenial, if not comforting, to use alcohol and tobacco, two "gross" things that have their use chiefly in a very

material world and have been more vilely abused in it than almost any others. Will Russian peasants be allowed to drink vodka and French workmen absinthe now that these things are forbidden them on earth?

No wonder Sir Arthur's views startled the clergy! Sir Arthur, like ourselves, enjoys his pipe and slippers of an evening, and can ill conceive a future world where these are absent. If he had given us these little lucubrations as a fantastical speculative essay we should sympathise with him, but we cannot do so when he sets out to tell us (*ipse dixit*) that these exist somewhere that is not our earth.

## II—REV. G. VALE OWEN.

In 1920 the "Weekly Despatch," with a characteristic desire for "sensational copy," published a series of extraordinary revelations purporting to be spirit-messages from "Beyond the Veil," which had been received by the Rev. G. Vale Owen, Vicar of Orford.

Thousands of pounds were, I understand, expended by the enterprising newspaper in the advertising of these curious "revelations," astonishing even in a land of literary "fakes" like England, which, said the paper, "will have profound consequences for the whole of humanity."

Whether these lofty hopes will be achieved is doubtful judging by the chorus of derision by which the "revelations" were met by all but a small minority of apparently quiet country people who believe everything they are told, especially if it be a parson who tells them.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, falling in with the advertising enthusiasm of the newspaper, describes the work in a preface



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in the following words, "Mark the ever-ascending beauty of the narrative, rising steadily until it reaches a level of sustained grandeur."

There can be no doubt that the Rev. G. Vale Owen is a highly-cultured, reflective parson, who has pondered deeply on the subjects that have interested him—so deeply, indeed, that he has probably become hallucinated. His tastes have been those of a gentle, refined country clergyman, very solicitous of the spiritual welfare of his flock, a lover of music, especially religious music, and probably a lover of good books, the good homelike books that clergymen read, not the strong literary meat of France, Russia or Scandinavia. I should imagine he has read Dante, as all clergymen ought to do, and other imaginative works about the "hereafter" and about ideal states and communities. The "heaven" or "hereafter" he describes is almost an exact replica of a peaceful English parish, where parishioners sing hymns and there is a good deal of music of a sacred character, where there are lay-helpers and lady district-visitors, and everything is more or less ruled by the clergyman and the lord or lady of the manor.

There are touches here and there reminiscent of Dante and other great writers, but never a flash of sublime original imagination, such as a Swedenborg gave to the world in the eighteenth century.

In Mr. Vale Owen's "heaven" there seems no room for those who have not been brought up in an English parish, so that obviously millions of Mohammedans and Hindoos and others in the world—who nevertheless worship God—must have found a different hereafter from that of Mr. Vale Owen or Sir A. Conan Doyle of which these "seers" know nothing.

Mr. Vale Owen's picture is certainly beautiful as well as lofty in descriptive style, and no one will deny him considerable literary ability or imagination of a certain restrained character; but rational-minded, logical people *require something more substantially convincing*. His sincerity is, we believe, unquestionable, but a slight examination of his work proves it to be extremely disappointing, full of ridiculous inconsistencies, and bearing every evidence that the writer when compiling it was in a sort of self-imposed trance or dream-condition—in other words, self-hypnotized through the very extent of his pondering on these serious subjects.

In her "messages," the vicar's mother conveys the information that she occupies one of the various zones encircling the earth; that the spirits ascend by degrees of light to regions of dazzling splendour, or descend by degrees of darkness and gloom into realms of darkness; that at death a person passes to the sphere for which his stage of development fits him, his transformation being gradual: that in the first sphere there are things similar to those on earth, trees, flowers, birds, animals, houses, water "whose playing is music," and so on. In the spheres beyond, the radiance is intensified. Thus the ascending scale is said to continue.

We are, it will be seen, asked to believe that "spirits" require houses, just as we do in the material world, to keep themselves warm, and that they require furniture, clothing and food. The "messages" even tell us there are palaces of music, with spacious gardens, where certain "musical spirits" are constantly engaged in studying harmony and *making their own musical instruments*.

In another "message" it is revealed that the spirits *will*

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themselves to travel from one mountain range to another "or even beyond." Later, however, a *bridge* is mentioned "over the chasm between the spheres of light and darkness." Why is a bridge necessary where *will* is sufficient?

Then is described a superior guiding spirit "one who seemed to be a high officer," and "our chief lady," and a big man, a kind of dark angel, who "in his times of hatred and frenzy is cruel," and it was explained how he had been allowed to torture and illtreat a little man from time to time "with the cruelty of a cowardly bully."

How many people, one wonders, would delight in the scenes described? How very like it all is to life on this poor earth, which, after all, seems good enough if this is all we are to get hereafter. The "chief ladies" and "high officers"—clergymen always have to be polite and nice to "patrons" and "lords of the manor"—bring back to one's mind all the petty tyranny and snobbery that used to be exercised by some of their kind on earth. And the cruel torturing bullies are common enough down here, but Mr. Vale Owen omits to tell us whether we can "hit back" in the paradisiacal regions of his imagination.

Quite frankly, if the reverend gentleman's mother and other "spirits" cannot tell us anything better than this, most of us will prefer not to listen to them and to remain down here as long as possible.

### III.—SIR OLIVER LODGE.

During a visit he made to New York, Sir Oliver Lodge "obliged" the American papers with some interesting copy which included the following views on the "hereafter."

Heaven, he said, "as a place where people go to when they

die," he doubted, while of hell he was even more sceptical. He believed there could be no place of permanent badness out of which departed spirits could not lift themselves.

"I do not hold," continued Sir Oliver, "that we become saints and go to heaven, or devils and go to hell. I don't think we are good enough for one or bad enough for the other. *Most people are rather weak.* That is why they go wrong, not because they want to. I think we all want to be better, and that we shall have a chance over there."

So far most of us will agree with the distinguished scientist and seer. Indeed, the best modern theology and psychologists agree with most of what he says, and Robert Burns, who was not a spiritualist but merely a peasant poet, said much the same thing. But it is in the passages that follow that Sir Oliver, after rather pompously delivering himself of facts which we can find out on earth without any spiritual intervention, pretends to have special knowledge of what is known and thought in the next world about these matters.

He continues: At any rate that is what the young fellows killed in the war say. *I have talked with a good many of them.* They are quite happy and active. They find a job, and only hope that people over here won't grieve about them too much. They haven't gone out of existence. They can't. I have known a few who tried and couldn't.

What! if they were "happy and active"? Why should they try to leave such a happy state as he describes?

They tell us about trees and animals and flowers, he goes on, and I sometimes think they still see this side

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from another point of view. The whole thing is worked through the sub-conscious, the dream stratum, which everybody possesses. I call communication with the dead another form of telepathy.

Sir Oliver admitted that "an awful lot of rubbish comes through," but adds that most of it is due to living one's "dream structure."

In other words, it evidently depends upon whether the medium is a *reliable* dreamer or not.

Sir Oliver's son Raymond was very much in touch with the family. "He knew I was coming to New York, and was much pleased, believing I should do a lot of good here."

What "good?" Sir Oliver must pardon us for speaking with apparent disrespect where his dearest affections are evidently the motive for much of what he says, but one cannot help asking what "good" the spirit son meant. Could a spirit be really interested in New York's being converted to a belief in spiritualism? Does it matter to those who have "gone on" whether we believe in them or not? If they are really actively interested in our beliefs and disbeliefs they should surely, with the superior powers they must possess, be able to bring more convincing proofs of their existence to the average unbiassed mind? Or was it "good" to himself—the material good which a profitable lecturing tour would mean? (He is said to have "netted" about £10,000 in three or four months).

All this uncertainty, all this wavering and wobbling on important points, confirm the sceptics and critics in their hostile attitude to these curious "revelations" and

lucubrations. And no amount of "copy" of this sort given to American papers will ever convince any but the most gullible that Sir Oliver Lodge, clever scientist though he be, knows a word more about the subject than you or I or the gatepost.

## CHAPTER V

### LIFE AFTER DEATH

THE belief in survival after death, or the belief in the existence of some place where the dead will meet each other again and know each other as they did on earth, is as old as man himself.

"The belief in a world peopled by the ghosts of men," writes Mr. Edward Lawrence, fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute, who has made a life-long study of the customs and superstitions of primitive societies, and the superstitious survivals among more advanced races, "is a belief held by cannibals and the lowest savages known to us; it is, therefore, neither a new religion nor a new revelation, but a system of superstition held by the most uncultured and barbaric representatives of the human race."

Every savage or primitive tribe possesses the belief in some form or another. Either departed spirits are supposed to continue life very much as it was on earth, or there is a change in which the soul still retains a certain identity. The belief in Metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls, is far more wide-spread than Christianity. The Suttee, or widow-burning, in India and Southern Asia, which was not finally abolished by the British authorities until the second decade of last century, arose from the belief that the dead chief or warrior would be uncomfortable without his wives.

"Non omnis moriar" ("I shall not wholly die") the Pagans used to declare. The religious rites and funeral practices of all nations, tribes and people, even the most degraded, show the prevalence of the belief. Elaborate ceremonies round the funeral pyre mark the obsequies of heroes among naked savages, while in cases where the bodies are buried in grave or cavern, various objects are commonly buried with them—rice, bread, water, even coins and clothes, lance, spear, stone axe, etc., on the assumption that the departed warrior or chief may require such articles when he awakens "elsewhere" from his sleep.

A modern traveller, writes the Rev. J. S. Vaughan, in "Life after Death," gives an account of a king or South African chief who wished to despatch a message to one of his favourite warriors who had fallen in battle, and whose remains had been entombed with the usual fantastic pomp and ceremony. He summoned into his dread presence a little naked boy of the tribe and gave him the message verbally. He then made him repeat it till he was satisfied that the child had thoroughly grasped it. Then the powerful savage drew his sword, and with a single well-directed blow, struck off the boy's head, exclaiming, "go and deliver my message!" This barbaric act showed the chief's firm belief that the boy and the warrior would probably meet again and be able to communicate about the things pertaining to this earth.

But folklore, history and the accounts of travellers are full of instances of the sort.

What then have Sir Conan Doyle, Sir Oliver Lodge, the Rev. Vale Owen, and other recent writers told us that all



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men did not already know? Have they advanced our knowledge? Have they confirmed a widespread hope and belief one tittle? Have they brought a single undeniable fact forward in proof of the creed?

The answer is—*No!*

Humanity is just where it was before. It believes—it hopes—it *knows nothing for certain.*

Dr. Bernard Hollander, the distinguished scientist, in his book "In Search of the Soul," maintains that the soul and its flight are still beyond definite human knowledge and only to be conceived by faith. "Science has made wonderful progress," he says, "but the problems of the First Cause, of the nature of the Soul, of the possibility of life after death, the nature of the forces which are beyond our control *are still where they were in pre-historic times.* Science has never touched the psychical: it is bound to be material, to be *limited by phenomena which can be verified by the senses.*"

Yet in spite of this unanimous "No" of science and of all the most serious inquirers, we find Miss Estelle Stead, daughter of the late W. T. Stead, the distinguished journalist, who was always a dreamer and a highly-strung person (as was evidenced by his founding the "psychic" society known as "Julia's Bureau,") we find Miss Stead telling us emphatically that there is an existence after death, and claiming to know the conditions of those who have crossed the border.

As usual, the great weakness in her evidence is the reliance placed upon the aid of a medium. Particular success is attributed to the agency of a medium named Mrs. Wriedt—in other words this lady, let us say, is more particularly susceptible to certain telepathic or hypnotic influences.

Miss Stead states that a Glasgow business man who brought his son and daughter and some friends, was "much to his surprise able to talk to his son who had been killed in the trenches."

"By Mrs. Wriedt's presence the necessary psychic force was there," said Miss Stead, "and the voice of the '*dead*' was heard describing himself to the satisfaction of his parents."

The average Glasgow business man would not have concluded a deal on such flimsy premises.

Another case quoted by Miss Stead is that concerning a sister who was able to speak to her dead brother. There had been a dispute at home as to the disposal of his badge, which had been made into a brooch, and the spirit-voice directed to whom the brooch should go and also mentioned where another relic would be found and how it was to be disposed of. This conversation settled a painful controversy between mother and daughter, and left both "satisfied" that the voice that had been heard was that of the dead boy.

In a general way, we are told, when the dead soldiers have demonstrated the fact of their survival, they go on to give information of a miscellaneous character. "Some of this information has proved to be mistaken: some of it has been found to be correct."

One cannot help wondering why they persist in keeping up their "soldier" character in the next world—or, rather, does not the reiteration of the word show that the fact of their having died as soldiers is the sub-conscious sentiment uppermost in the mind of the relatives, though a year or two before these sons and brothers may have been stone-masons or draper's assistants."

Miss Stead goes on to say that it would be most difficult for them to explain themselves properly, seeing that we only realise things by comparison, and that if a thing is not explained to us in the terms of our own vocabulary, it is unintelligible to us. And it is not easy for the spirits always to express themselves, "especially in the case of the newly dead, for they have to learn how to communicate with the earthly plane. That is why our khaki heroes who talk to us from the other side frequently cannot do more than prove that they are there."

The treatment of dead spirits as "khaki heroes" is, as a fact, very little removed from the superstition of the primitive tribesmen who put spears and flint axes into the burial places of their heroes. It is an effort, consciously or sub-consciously, to comfort those who still mourn their dead and assure them that they are happy.

But do the spirits *prove* that they are there? We cannot believe it upon such poor and unsupported evidence. The asseverations of a medium in a trance certainly do not prove it, whether that medium is fraudulently acting the part of a departed person so well as to succeed in deceiving the relatives, or if unknowingly the medium is herself the victim of tricks of telepathy and hypnotism—two of the most uncontrollable of psychic forces known to man.

Sir Oliver Lodge bases his professed knowledge that death is only a quitting of the material life for another, closely allied and not at all dissimilar, upon conditions which his scientific investigations have disclosed from time to time, by which means messages are said to have been received across the gulf "and the barrier is opaque no longer." He is, however, wisely guarded in his statements, and admits that

the messages that come are still being carefully examined, and that the whys and wherefores are still subject to investigation. "We do not pretend," he says, "that the whole rationale of the process of communication is clear. That is what we are engaged in studying. If there were no difficulty, the human race would have known all about it long ago." It is just on account of these difficulties that we should not allow enthusiasm and credulity to get the better of us.

Now let us turn to the declaration of another inquirer, just as worthy of consideration as the above, whose experience is certainly interesting, but who leaves the whole question quite open, in fact, concludes his recital with a big note of interrogation.

Sir George Kekewich relates the following curious "experience" at the death of his mother. His sister, who was in the room at the time, told him: "When our mother died, a shape with red hair hovered over the bed. This is all the more inexplicable to me, for, as you know, our mother had an aversion to people with red hair." Sir George remembered this aversion of his mother's, recollecting also that his mother had had a younger sister, of whom she had been passionately fond, who had red hair. This sister died, and the mother never ceased to regret her death, so that if there was anyone to whom she would wish to be reunited, it was this sister. He inferred that the sister had come to escort his mother to the other side.

Sir George Kekewich cautiously observes: "All I profess to believe from my own experiences and the experiences of those I can trust is that there is survival on the other side, and though I have no clear view of the kind of survival, it is

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hard to resist the conclusion that it must carry with it a more or less perfect degree of the survival of identity."

But after giving several interesting instances of personal experiences, he adds: "I remain, however, in the position of an enquirer waiting to hear more before coming to any positive conclusion."

That is the position of all sensible and right thinking people. Many people will remember the remarkable experience of the famous French scientist, Professor Charles Richet, some years ago with the medium Mademoiselle Martha B. at the Villa Carmen at Algiers. On that occasion the Professor and a friend, who were keenly interested in solving the claims of spiritualists, took as they thought every precaution possible to avoid fraud. On two occasions they saw and photographed a "phantom" wearing a turban and a white tunic. On the second occasion, the Professor asked that the phantom should blow into a tube filled with baryta water, and as this became turbid, it proved that the spirit inhaled carbonic acid gas.

Yet, astounding as it will seem to-day, this distinguished scientist believed at the time that he had seen a spirit form, and, in interviews, scouted any idea of his having been duped by the medium, so thorough had been the precautions taken.

It was not until years later that the whole thing was proved to have been a clever and elaborate fraud.

Does not this instance prove that, quite apart from the question of sincerity, the very evidence of one's senses must be brought to the test?

## CHAPTER VI

### WHAT IS THE USE OF CLAIRVOYANTS

BEARING upon the question which has often been raised as to why those possessing clairvoyant powers do not assist the police in unravelling crime mysteries, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in a letter to the "Daily Express" (October 21, 1921), tries to meet his critics by inferring that clairvoyants really could solve these mysteries but for the unbelief of the police themselves. He writes:—

The recent finding of bones by the vision of a clairvoyant at Ventnor should get it into our thick crania that psychic phenomena are very real and practical things.

When we become more civilised, every great police station will have its own psychometrist, who will be left uncontaminated for that work only. It is a reform which I have urged before. Instead of prosecuting mediums, police and magistrates would be more profitably employed in using them.

These remarks are prompted by the recent case of Mr. Oscar Gray. A week after his disappearance, his parents asked for my co-operation. Taking an old coat of the boy's, we called, without mentioning Mr. Gray's name, upon two leading clairvoyants, Miss Ortnier and Mrs. Johnson. *The results were by no means perfect*, but I am sure that Mr. and Mrs. Gray found consolation in them, and in some ways

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they were very accurate. Each seer on handling the coat, said it belonged to some one who was lost and was still alive. *This in itself was remarkable*, as many poor parents are still seeking information about those whom they lost in the war. They were positive that the lad was alive. Both said that he would be found, and Miss Ortner gave a positive date—"three weeks from now"—which was quite correct. "No use chasing here, there and everywhere," said the message, "He is a prisoner of circumstance," not a bad description of a soldier tied to his barracks. Mrs Johnson saw him in a room with a row of beds, which also suggests a barracks.

It is, as must be admitted, "*looking in a glass darkly*," and yet every now and again there is a flash which is above coincidence, and may call the human intelligence to some vital point in a problem.

But our "thick crania," by which phrase Sir Arthur evidently means to include all unbelievers, refuse to see wonders in occurrences that can by a little thinking be explained otherwise than by the intervention of spirits or other supernatural powers. "Coincidence" goes very far, and the two clairvoyants, having had such experiences before, did not need to be very clever to guess that the owner of the coat brought to them was lost.

It is because of the *unreliability* of clairvoyants, many of whom have proved, indeed, to be more than unreliable, and the results they produce being "by no means perfect," that the police are justified in ignoring them.

Some of their prophecies, it is granted, have been remarkably near the mark, but most people will see in this fact, and they will be right, nothing more than remarkable coincidence—

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successful "chance shots" which in various connections are often quite astonishing.

When it comes to a definite "yes" or "no," these people fail lamentably. Like the ordinary medium, they become vague and evasive. The occasional "flash" which Sir Arthur considers to be "above coincidence," may sometimes call attention to a vital point, but it is too occasional and uncertain to become of real practical utility or solid worth. "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," and a very slight encouragement will afford temporary "consolation" to poor parents seeking for information about those they have lost.

Thus a very weak case is established for the practical utility of clairvoyance, and something much more convincing than Sir Arthur's showing will be requisite before this "extra sense" can be recognised by law as a serious asset in the important business of assisting the police in solving criminal or other problems.

Mr. Stuart Cumberland's reply to the above letter of Sir Arthur is very pertinent. He writes :—

My friendly antagonist Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is, I see, all for linking up the psychometrist folk with the police in order to unearth crime. Good! There are several murder and other crime mysteries awaiting solution which mere police intelligence has been unable to supply.

What about the Cambridge shop murder? What have Sir Arthur's psychic friends done towards bringing this home to the actual criminal? On the morning of the "Beach murder" a clairvoyant was called in, and held a mystic séance on the very spot where the body of the murdered girl was found. The conclusions of this mystic were wholly wide of



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the mark, and the crime was eventually brought home to the actual murderers by recognised police methods, and they duly suffered the penalty of the law.

It is not enough for these gifted psychics to construct unfathomed tragedies out of the chance discovery of a few ancient bones, or to arouse agreeable expectations that a missing man will be found by fingering his coat. Assuredly this psychic "sensing" should go a good deal further. Let us be told who were the murdered, and who are or were the murderers, furnishing at the same time *practical proof* of these conclusions. And why could not Sir Arthur's clairvoyants have told straightway where the missing boy Gray was to be found?

That is indeed the crux of the whole matter. Either it is of real value or it is of no value—there can be no half measures. Until the practical proof of its value is forthcoming, and we are very far from finding any, one can only maintain that it has no value worth considering.

## VII

### MORE STRANGE CLAIMS OF THE SPIRITUALISTS.

Dr. ELLIS POWELL is another recent writer on the subject of spiritualism, but although he lays claim to many years' experience of séances and communication with alleged spirits, he is just as disappointing as the rest. His experiments are always associated with the inevitable "medium" and automatic writing, processes that have to ordinary people become stereotyped and extremely monotonous.

But one strange claim that this writer makes cannot be passed unnoticed, as it is one of the most extraordinary that has ever been made outside the realms of wild romance. He says that "nearly all very young children are clairvoyant."

The statement becomes even more astonishingly grotesque when we learn what the evidence is upon which Dr. Powell bases it.

"My own children have more than once," he writes, "sat in a materialisation circle, and this when they were quite young."

Poor little creatures, to be brought into the presence of such things, which those who are far older and wiser than they cannot understand! These children were educated to expect "visions," and, with natural child-like ardour, to wish to "see things," and hence with very little natural imagination they

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could easily believe they saw them. The wonder is *that they remain sane.*

"Many parents, unfortunately," writes Dr. Powell, "make the mistake of forgetting that nearly all young children are clairvoyant. This is particularly the case during the first year or two of their lives. It is the explanation of the baby's frequent delighted smile when apparently there is nothing particular for it to smile about. Moreover, it explains the youngster's gaze of wonder when to all appearance it is only looking at the ceiling or the sky. The fact is that its own guardian spirit is often there. It is visible to the clairvoyant eyesight of the baby, though beyond the reach of ordinary human vision."

Does Dr. Powell really expect the average father and mother to believe this? And is it not an example of how some of these spiritualists have need of a good douche of the cold water of common sense?

So according to this doctor's theory—for a mere fantastic theory it is, since babies do not confide their thoughts even to Dr. Powell and he cannot read their innocent minds—when baby smiles so sweetly or merely looks vacant, he or she has just "spotted" a spirit and is either lost in fascinated wonderment and admiration or is smiling approvingly at his charming appearance. The utter nonsense of it all is obvious when one knows that the average child is terror-stricken at the thought of a "ghost" or "bogeyman," or any suggestion of a presence that can be described as "uncanny." If Dr. Powell's theory had any basis, most children would be so familiar with spirits and "guardian angels" as to care little or nothing about them.

We prefer the theories, based upon sound sense, of mothers

and grandmothers. I remember a very wise grandmother, who had brought up many children, saying to me as a child, when I remarked to her: "Grandma, look at baby smiling!" "No, child, that's not smiling; *it's wind!*" I remember also a mother, when a "gushy" lady visitor exclaimed about a little girl: "Look at the divine light in those eyes!" replying calmly and with knowledge: "No, dear, it's greed, she wants some more cake."

In one of the most recent of these books of alleged "communications," containing a heap of inconsequential "conversations" of a mother, with her dead son, it is actually claimed that one "message" conveyed the name of the Derby winner *weeks before the race was run*.

Now if the "spirits" can be induced to impart such, from a worldly point of view, valuable information once, there is no reason why their powers of prophecy should not be drawn upon annually, or in connection with any race, for that matter. Spiritualists as a rule are as coldly commercial as most other mortals, and sufficiently "cute" to grasp the advantage of accumulating fortunes in this way. And they could convince all unbelievers by doing so. What the astonished bookmakers would say one can only conjecture, but that matters little.

Money could be obtained for charitable purposes in this way if charitably-minded spiritualists preferred it. Or again, as betting is a recognised evil, though so many of us wink at it, it could easily be abolished by spiritual means, for, if the result were announced publicly beforehand and it was found, after one or two experiments, that the "spirits" were telling the truth, betting on horse racing would not be worth while

and would automatically cease without any interference from the legislation. If none of these things take place, the only logical conclusion is that *it can't be done*, and that we are again face to face with a curious and isolated but by no means unexampled coincidence, which proves and can prove nothing at all except that the writer of the book is amiably but extraordinarily credulous.

But the book under notice contains numbers of inconsistencies, such as that where the writer states: "We found that he"—her dead son—"saw and noticed most things, even to the change in the arrangement of the furniture or rooms. . . ." And yet: "Please tell me everything that happens," he once wrote, "I want to know all."

At other times he knew without telling. Sir A. Conan Doyle contributes a foreword of praise to the book, showing how curiously spiritualists cling together in their obstinate superstitions.

There has lately been a great deal of talk about alleged "spirit photographs"—notably the photo of the late W. E. Gladstone, to which columns of controversy were devoted in the daily papers. Yet any amateur photographer is aware how easily photographs can be "faked."

The portrait of Mr. Gladstone in question, published in the "Daily Express," Dec. 13, 1919, was not even like Gladstone. In fact, the owner of it, the Rev. Walter Wynn, an enthusiastic spiritualist, admitted that on submitting it to Lord Gladstone, the statesman's son replied: "I cannot say that I can trace any likeness either in features or in the shape of the face or the head."

Mr. Nevil Maskelyne has more than once offered to show

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Mr. Wynn how such photographs can be produced by trick methods, but he has, I believe, not been given the opportunity.

The exposures of "faked" photographs are almost as numerous as those of fraudulent mediums.

Sir Oliver Lodge states that in the course of his psychic work he has been in communication with the spirits of some who took their own lives. The first, he tells us in an article on "The Ethics of Suicide" in the "Fortnightly Review," was a brilliant young scientist who, after many unsuccessful attempts, killed himself.

What was his experience after? He found himself in captivity, in some sort of a reformatory, apparently. He momentarily escaped to speak to me, rushing impulsively and affectionately forward as was his wont, but he was taken back, and I have not heard from him since.

"I have spoken to others also who have shortened their own lives; but one or two of those who succumbed to the temptation were suffering from a miserable condition, and these were apparently treated leniently.

He concludes by saying that suicide is a futile crime. We must suffer punishment beyond what we had anticipated, and carry on an existence intensified by pangs of helpless remorse. The idea of getting out of existence may seem attractive, but it is a false attraction; the thing cannot be done.

You think that you will not know of the troubles which you have left behind for survivors—but you will. You will see the result and bitterly lament them.

The Christian Church, and some others, condemn suicide anyhow, so that Sir Oliver is not making any new

revelation when he tells us it is not a courageous or Christian thing to do. But again one is led to ask—what reasonable or even slightly tangible proof can he give us that he really spoke to the spirits of those who had destroyed themselves, and that, not to put it too crudely, his imagination is not playing him a trick? We are no whit "farrarder" when we have been told those things, for those who are sceptics will not have their scepticism shaken by them.

Dante and others have already told us of the terrors awaiting suicides in the next world, and if the old-fashioned threats of the Church are not sufficient to deter those who destroy themselves in a moment of passion or aberration, it is doubtful whether Sir Oliver's "spiritual" warnings will do so.

After the above "experiences" and "conclusions," the statements made by the late Major General Sir Alfred Turner, another "serious student" of spiritualism, simply leave us amazed that the distinguished soldier could calmly give the following as "facts," without a tittle of evidence to go upon beyond his own mild assertion.

Sir Alfred relates that on one occasion he was sitting with a medium (always the medium, the reader will notice) when a voice called him "uncle." "At first he could not think who it was, but then the Christian name was mentioned and he identified the spirit as that of a boy of nineteen, an officer of the Guards, who had been brutally murdered by a German officer. The battalion of the Guards to which this boy belonged was being pressed back by the Germans, who were in greatly superior numbers, and he was hit by a piece of shrapnel and knocked over. The pressure was so great that they could not carry him away, and a German officer was seen

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to shoot him with his revolver. This German was subsequently captured, identified, tried by drumhead court-martial, and shot."

This young fellow had always called Sir Alfred Turner "uncle," though he was really no relative. When he spoke to him *through the medium*, he said that he was "perfectly happy" and had no wish to return to earth. He added that since his spirit had left his body he had been received and helped by other spirits.

Sir Alfred declared that he had heard this boy's voice on several occasions, and added: "I have been an earnest investigator in psychical research for a great many years, and I have had many experiences which to me have *proved absolutely that life is continuous* and that there is no such thing as death, unless the disintegration of the physical body can be so called."

We have every respect for Sir Alfred Turner's views, and his efforts to confirm them, but, as has been shown, he shares them merely with the vast majority of mankind, and he has no more *proof* or reliable evidence to give than the rest of us. It is difficult to avoid hurting the emotional and sentimental feelings of spiritualists, but one can only describe Sir Alfred's "experience" as extremely unconvincing, and the mere recital of the history of the young Guardsman's sad end, which really has no more to do with the question of survival after death than "the flowers that bloom in the spring," shows that emotion was uppermost in the soldier's mind. It is one thing to condemn the treacherous act of an enemy: it is quite another to be convinced that the "voice" he heard was really that of the young man, and that



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the medium was reliable. If I had stolen five pounds from the distinguished soldier and he had brought me into court for it, he would not have let me off on such flimsy evidence as this—even though I had told him that a German had previously robbed me!

## VIII

### SOME ILLUMINATING CRITICISMS

MR. STUART CUMBERLAND, author of "That Other World," etc., a well known investigator, whose practical experience of "occult phenomena" and their manufacture, rank him as an authority on these questions, has given the following interesting opinions about the "revelations" of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle:

All so-called spirit manifestations, he writes, are the outcome either of wilful fraud or illogical self-deception, and are explicable upon a perfectly natural basis. This I undertake to demonstrate personally. Surely if spirits could manifest, they could do so to those closest to them, and not through paid or unpaid stranger mediumship. That is the crux of the whole matter.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is by no means certain of his own ground in the matter of phenomena to which from time to time he has pinned his faith. His belief in messages from the Beyond apparently began with 'spirit-rapping' and the dark room gyrations of mundane tambourines. To these exceedingly unspiritual manifestations were added 'spirit photography,' spirit writing, and clairvoyant readings. The manipulation of all these "stunts" have been exposable quantities, and in many cases actually have been exposed, as, for instance, the

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tambourine-slinging Welsh mediums and the so-called ghost-raising and clairvoyant readings of the masked medium, in the exposure of which manifestations I was personally associated. Then there is that spirit-photograph produced at Crewe whose 'gifts' will not stand the test that precludes the possibility of mundane manipulation.

Wherein, I would ask, lies Sir Arthur's definite proofs of post-mortem existence? It is just this one definite proof that I have all my life been searching for in many lands and amongst many peoples. What may be a definite proof to those who are only too ready to accept as a fact that which is at variance with actual facts, cannot obviously be accepted off-hand by those who seek the true inwardness of things under proper test conditions. So long as other-world happenings and influences are the outcome of physical demonstrations and illustrations *through human agency*, then surely it is the duty of the sane to adopt measures to see that so-called spiritual control is not merely the outcome of human manipulation.

There are two kinds of spiritualists; the wilful deceivers and the self-deceived: and the greatest form of deception is that of self-deception. I feel sure that Sir Arthur is thoroughly sincere in his belief. His attitude towards accepted religion, and the spiritual guides associated therewith is one of intense earnestness; but *I am none the less convinced that he is self-deceived, and that his conclusions are based upon false premises.*

A criticism from the Church, or rather a criticism from a clergyman which probably expresses the views of a large number of his fellow clerics, is contained in an able article by the Rev. J. N. Newland-Smith in "The Sign," for

November, 1921. Mr. Newland-Smith, for the sake of putting his case, places himself on the same platform as the spiritualists, and allows that there may be "something in it," but he goes on to point out the inadequacy and the absurdities of the contentions of the spiritualists, as well as the danger surrounding the practice of the cult. He says :

A medium is a person of highly sensitive nervous temperament, who is more capable of receiving impressions from the soul-world than the ordinary person is. Just as the artist has a keener sight and can appreciate differences of light and shade to a greater extent than the average man, or as the musician can discern slight differences of tone and pitch which are not noticed by others, so too the medium has a keener soul-sense or psychic sense than most. But this power appears to me, as far as I can judge, to be a natural rather than a religious faculty. It is a psychic rather than spiritual power.

After describing the "modus operandi," he goes on:—

The medium, more generally a woman than a man, relaxes her will and all her faculties, so as to become as passive and inert as possible. Sometimes she goes into a sort of trance, and is personally unconscious of all that takes place. At any rate, her soul becomes in such loose connection with her body that the departed spirit can take control of her body, and use her lips to speak with, her ears to hear with, or her hands to write with, and so on. Questions are often put by the friends about matters known only to the departed, in order to test whether they are really speaking with him or no.

Such, at any rate, is the contention of the spiritualists. I know it is sometimes possible to account in other ways for

the messages given by the lips of the medium. There is such a thing as telepathy, that is the transferring of thought from the brain of one person to the brain of another without any written or spoken message. There are thought-waves something like wireless waves. In many cases you might maintain that the message was simply a thought transferred from the brain of one of the people in the room to the brain of the medium, and not from any spirit who is *out of the body*; but I am going to assume that the Spiritualist account of the matter is correct. . . .

Nevertheless, it is true that the Church has always discouraged any dealings with spiritualism, and on very good grounds.

First of all, because all the exponents of the higher pagan religions in India and elsewhere agree in teaching that such communications are not for the welfare of the spirit who has departed. They keep him, or her, hovering on the borders of earth, and hinder his advance and spiritual development.

Secondly, because the practice is highly dangerous for the medium. The medium has to yield up the control of his or her will, and to become as passive as possible. Consequently the medium is more or less at the mercy of any wandering spirit who may desire to gain control of a material body for any purpose, good or bad. The medium cannot be sure of getting into touch with the particular spirit desired. It is therefore highly dangerous to the medium. True, there must be some affinity, some point of contact. It would be difficult for the spirit of a drunkard to gain control of a total abstainer, or for a spirit of evil passions to gain control of a medium of pure and devout life. Nevertheless, nervous breakdowns, and in some cases insanity, are often the result of mediumship. Suppose a spirit gains control, and refuses

to relinquish control, what then? Are the cases of demoniacal possession recorded by the Evangelists merely (as some assert) crude and unscientific ways of describing cases of delusion, lunacy and epilepsy? Or is it possible that the Evangelists were wiser than some of their critics?

Thirdly, there is no guarantee that the message comes from the spirit whom you seek. It might do so, or it might not. Another spirit might try to impersonate the one desired. Spiritualists themselves have compared mediumship to a telephone exchange. They say that there is a rush for the telephone on the other side, whenever communication is opened up. If this be so, how can you tell which spirit gains possession of the receiver? Granting that the message given by the medium comes from the spirit world, you cannot be sure from whom it comes.

Lastly, none of those whom our LORD raised from the dead have told us their experience. Lazarus left no record of his four days in the unseen world. From this fact the Church has inferred that we are not intended to know as yet; that this discipline of ignorance is part of GOD'S plan for us here, and that we ought not to try to indulge a premature curiosity.

## IX

### UNACCEPTED CHALLENGES

DURING Sir Oliver Lodge's stay in New York, Mr. J. R. Rinn, an ex-member of the American Psychic Research Society, who has exposed a number of mediums, *offered one thousand pounds to the Society if Sir Oliver or anybody else could produce, under scientific conditions, the slightest tenable evidence of communication with spirits or any other supernatural fact.*

Mr. Rinn added, "I will give another one thousand pounds if Sir Oliver Lodge or anyone else meets this simple test:—Mediums state that they are in communication with the late Dr. Richard Hodgson, and Dr. James Hyslop, secretary of the American Psychic Research Society, says that he receives messages from Dr. Hodgson.\* I was formerly a co-worker with Dr. Hodgson, and seven hours before he died he wrote me a letter, which is now in my safe. I will give one thousand pounds if any medium can read that letter. I am also willing to pay up on this condition—I will confront any medium with five persons. Let the medium tell me the facts about any one of these persons and I will forfeit the money. *I can give Sir Oliver Lodge any kind messages from his son Raymond under the precise conditions*

\* Died in June 1920.

*he received them from psychics in England. It is a fact of history that these great men of science are easily dupes for clever fakers."*

Mr. Rinn's fair and reasonable challenge has not been accepted either by Sir Oliver or any other medium or spiritualist. Far from his son's belief that Sir Oliver's visit to New York would "do a lot of good" being realised, that visit has undoubtedly greatly weakened his position and status, and he would have done better to stay at home. *If there were any real utility in communicating with the spirits, surely Sir Oliver's son could and would have warned him of the challenge awaiting him in New York.*

Another important challenge to spiritualists was thrown down by the Rev. W. E. Rees, rector of Wiston, who, on February 21, 1921, gave a public exhibition of "magic" at Colchester in order to demonstrate practically and expose the trickery of spiritualists. Mr. Rees, who successfully deceived a large audience, including several medical men, for some hours, among other phenomena, disappeared from a padlocked box and reappeared in the body of the hall. His object was to show that nothing occurs at spiritual séances that cannot be performed by trickery.

"I desire to convince people," he said, "that alleged messages from the dead received at spiritualistic séances *are the results of trickery.* I am prepared to meet any body of spiritualists on a platform."

This simple and perfectly fair challenge has also never been accepted.

Nor has the following "Tests for Spiritualists," as it was



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headed when it appeared as a letter to the editor of the "Globe," March 16, 1920:—

It is becoming fashionable in literary circles to write a book of alleged "communications" with a dead son.

Miss Helen Mathers, who has just died, was compiling another such work, and I suggest that Sir A. Conan Doyle, or some other serious student of the cult, should, in support of his claims, at once communicate with Miss Mathers and obtain her unfinished revision of this book. Can it be done?

Failure to accomplish this—of course, in the presence of impartial witnesses—should be sufficient to definitely dispose of spiritualistic claims once and for all. If the opportunity is ignored, the public can draw their own conclusions.—  
A. L. SUMMERS.

The public will draw their own conclusions from the fact that none of these interesting and not out-of-the-way challenges have met with a shadow of response from spiritualists.

Some years ago, in Paris, Professor Gustave Le Bon, the well-known philosopher, offered a large sum of money to any medium who would carry on his table-turning experiences *in daylight*, so convinced was he that the darkness required for these experiments foster fraud. That challenge also was never taken up.

## X

### DANGERS OF SPIRITUALISM

Is spiritualism a wholesome practice which people can take up without danger to themselves? Many serious observers maintain that *it is not*, that it is fraught with danger to the individual who follows it because, among other reasons, it weakens the will-power, destroys the reasoning faculties, and brings the victim into a hyper-sensitive, super-emotional condition. Some recent cases tend to confirm these opinions.

Dr. A. T. Schofield, speaking at the Royal United Service Institute, severely condemned modern spiritualism as unclean, and quoted some terrible examples of the fate that has overtaken those who have been too much addicted to it. 'It is,' he said, "spreading like poison gas among the class least well equipped to resist its insidious influence."

The evil wrought, he maintained, took physical, mental and spiritual forms, and too often ended in the most terrible fate that could befall a human being—"absolute possession by an unclean spirit." Among instances quoted by the speaker was that of a delicate, refined lady who in her paroxysms poured out a terrible flood of obscenity and blasphemy. In the case of a patient of his own, hardened asylum nurses declined to remain in attendance because of

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the utterances "which they regarded as coming from the spirit of hell." A young officer of his acquaintance lost his reason through association with a spiritist centre, and after an attempt to kill his own father "through love," ended a few weeks later by taking his own life in an asylum.

Lecturing at Morley Hall, Hanover square, on February 4, 1920, Dr. Schofield also stated that a great many cases of insanity were due to practice in spiritualism. One doctor had put the number at one million. The reason frequently gave way under the strain. If it was to be regarded as a science, spiritualism already had a long roll of martyrs. No medium existed who had not suffered physically, mentally or morally.

A serious warning comes from Dr. Curry, Medical Director of the State Insane Asylum of New Jersey, with regard to the use of the "Ouija board," which he declares is a "dangerous factor" in unbalancing the mind. "The Ouija" board, he says, is especially serious because it is adopted mainly by persons of high-strung neurotic tendency who become victims of actual illusions of sight, hearing, and touch at spiritualistic séances. He predicts that the insane asylums will be flooded with patients if popular taste does not soon swing to more wholesome diversions.

At an inquest at Greenwich recently on a man named Percy Gerald Atkinson, aged 32, it was stated that he had committed suicide as the direct result of studying spiritualism.

Again, according to the New York correspondent of the "Daily Express," March 25, 1920, "at the village of Cerrito, across San Francisco Bay, the craze for séances with

Ouija boards, with which it is claimed that spirit messages can be received, has reached such a pitch that five people have been driven mad and taken to the lunatic asylum. There is a strong demand for the examination of all the 1200 inhabitants of the village by mental specialists."

But perhaps the most striking instance of the fanaticism into which "students" of spiritualism can work themselves is the case of Prof. T. Bradford, of the Columbia College of Oratory, Chicago, who on February 6, 1921, committed suicide for the sole purpose of proving that the dead can communicate with their living friends. He maintained that he could after death establish communication with a certain young woman living at Detroit, to whom, he asserted, his "mind was perfectly attuned."

So far, however, the eagerly expected communication has not been received either by the young woman or by any other of his friends, the only "message" that has been received, it is understood, being one from the local police who wanted to gather evidence for legal proceedings.

Mr. Elliot O'Donnell, one of the leading authorities on ghostly phenomena, asserts: "Constantly striving to get in touch with the Unknown is, in my opinion, apt to lead to dangerous results. So far—despite assertions made to the contrary by would-be authorities on the subject—WE KNOW ABSOLUTELY NOTHING OF THE FORCES ON THE OTHER SIDE. There is no getting away from the fact that this present world-wide craze to get into touch with the dead is having a very disastrous effect."

## XI

### THE DANGERS OF HYPNOTISM

THE dangers surrounding hypnotism, which has more to do with spiritualism than most of the adepts believe, are also not lightly to be overlooked. Unscrupulous charlatans possessing powerful personalities are more than a match for grief-stricken, hysterical women, or even for some of the learned professors who dabble in the unknown. If only for this reason alone, whatever eminent men choose to tell us of their experiences and beliefs cannot be taken as reliable or as any solution of the problems they seek to solve outside their own range of studies.

The New York Institute of Science has for years been teaching the powers of hypnotism through the post. We know what base uses can be made of the power.

A case is recorded of a woman in Kansas City who followed a course of hypnotism by correspondence, and then by means of hypnotic suggestion induced her husband to deed all his property to her, after which she refused to live with him any longer.

By such means, fraudulent persons can produce occult phenomena sufficient to satisfy the credulous, and we must remember that human credulity is boundless. Imaginative, constructive minds like those of Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir A. Conan Doyle, through constant intense concentration on

one subject, are even more susceptible to the influence of such delusions than some ordinary unimaginative minds would be.

Also many believers in spiritualism prefer to delude themselves *into rejecting arguments that tell against their own fond but foolish beliefs*. It is an attitude frequently met with in religious and all other forms of fanaticism.

A newspaper paragraph coming from Vienna, September 30, 1921, shows up, among others, in a peculiarly striking fashion, the dangerous possibilities of hypnotism :—

Dr. E. Eitner, a well-known plastic surgeon, describes in a Vienna medical journal his successful operations on hypnotised patients without the use of anaesthetics. He finds that operations on the head, such as the correction of crooked noses or outstanding ears, or the sewing together of deep cuts, can be carried through without anaesthetics. The hypnotised patient feels no pain and has no recollection of what he has undergone when he is awakened.

From this it will be seen how easily those with criminal or evil intentions can “operate” on persons whom they wish to rob or otherwise victimise. If the hypnotised person “feels no pain and has no recollection” of what happens during a serious surgical operation, the same conditions can and do accompany the “operations of the criminally intentioned on their victims.”

The above paragraph should be a solemn warning to enthusiastic would-be spiritualists against rashly placing themselves in the power of unscrupulous clairvoyants and others who, for ulterior motives, play upon the credulity of students of the occult.

## CHAPTER XII

### WHERE ARE WE?

To what conclusions, then, does all this bring us?

That the world and our life are full of unknown, uncontrollable, undefined forces, is a well-established fact.

"Do you suppose for one moment," says Professor Charles Richet, the French scientist, "that we have reached the full development of our mental and psychical powers? I do not. From the point of view of development we are still but children, and a thousand years hence men will see what a short distance we have travelled along the path of evolution."

Yet even to-day there are preliminary signs of the existence of sources of knowledge other than those we are accustomed to in our daily life. Telepathy and hypnotism have been recognised by science as forces that exist, but the best authorities maintain that they are in such a rudimentary state that they should be handled with extreme care, that they cannot as yet be relied upon, and in their present state of evolution may even be a positive danger in the hands of foolish or incompetent persons—much more so, therefore, in the hands of those with evil or even interested intentions.

So far all serious thinking people are agreed. Scientists grant as much. Apart from fraud, superstition, illusions, and so on, "there are certainly," says Prof. Camille Flammarion,

"psychological facts which are worthy of the attention of investigators."

But to jump from these now well-known and recognised premises to a belief in the possibility of communication with the dead or of receiving messages from them regarding our own future state, or indeed anything else, is mere delusion, and dangerous delusion. Telepathy and hypnotism are psychic phenomena having to do with the relations between mind and mind and mind and body, insufficiently explained as yet in their working or their effects but having no logical or palpable relation with spiritism or ghost-ism.

All the evidence brought against mediums and spiritual manifestations show, as has been seen in the foregoing pages, that the public must be seriously warned against these "revelations," however sensational their character, and however eminent their apologists may be—nay, their very character of being "sensational" in the newspaper sense, is their great danger.

Apart from the fact that spiritualists have as yet *proved nothing*, and have more often than not simply been defrauded, the exercise of this so-called "science" is fraught, as we have seen, with great danger to the weak minded, the over imaginative and highly strung, and is more calculated to bring disaster than comfort to most of us.

As for mediums, a crushing blow was given to the entire fraternity by Dr. Sidney R. Wilson, the eminent Manchester physician, formerly in the Physiological Department of the Manchester University, speaking to the Chorlton Literary Society.

"A spiritualistic medium," he said, "was a physiologica



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curiosity whose sub-conscious brain was larger than the normally controlling super-granular layer. With the exception of this conscious brain, all the nerve cells acted according to automatic or reflex action. The laws controlling these actions had been very fully worked out by Professor Sherrington, who showed that in the nervous system there was a common path which could only be occupied by one message at a time. Sherrington's laws were equally applicable to the sub-conscious brain. If the controlling or argumentative layer of the brain were sent to sleep, the subconscious brain would, with mathematical accuracy, respond to suggestions, and all kinds of abnormal phenomena could be produced to order. The sub-conscious brain not being logical, any message put to it was taken as the truth, even if false. It was possible to inhibit the conscious brain and so leave open the common path of the sub-conscious brain. In this state any suggestion made was accurately fulfilled, irrespective of conviction or argument. Dr. Wilson showed, by practical demonstration upon members of his audience, how when the conscious brain was stilled, the sub-conscious brain *reproduced all the different kinds of spiritualistic phenomena*. Table-turning was a simple matter, and upon its being suggested to those sitting round the table that they could see the spirit of the lecturer rising out of the table, *they leaned back with every symptom of wonder and surprise on their faces as the materialisation took place, although there was nothing material there!*"

One of the subjects wrote a sentence in Latin, a language he did not know. The sub-conscious brain of another recalled an incident he had entirely forgotten, and transmitted

it to paper. The externalisation of sensibility was also illustrated, the subject being impervious to the effect of a drawing-pin pushed into him.

Mr. Joseph McCabe, the rationalist, who challanged Sir A. Conan Doyle to public debate, said, "Moving furniture and playing instruments while the medium is supposed to be bound, is not only childish in itself, but has been exposed over and over again. Messages generally require little explanation. *There is always something in them which shows their human origin.* Thus in Mr. Vale Owen's messages we read that there are *rivers in a land where it never rains.*

While one has respect for the opinions of such brains as those possessed by men like Sir Oliver Lodge, or the late Sir William Crookes, one does not forget that, like all human beings, not only are they liable to error, but the very fact of their investigations having all their lives lain in certain directions that necessitated an inquiring mind, has made them rather prone to be duped than otherwise. This was shown in the remarkable case of Professor Richet, quoted in the preceding pages. Men of the type known as "men of the world," who cultivate broader views and have a wider general knowledge of affairs and of their fellow-men than the purely scientific mind, are a safer guide in these matters.

#### FAMOUS INQUIRERS

In France and Italy numbers of great men have sought in the pretensions of the spiritualists for the answer to the riddle of the Universe. Men of such varied minds as Victor Hugo,

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Alexandre Dumas, Victorien Sardou, the great dramatist who wrote a play on the subject; Jules Claretie, the critic; Camille Flammarion and Lombroso, the scientists, and many others, have earnestly investigated the phenomena, but always with the same lack of convincing results. "There is something which we cannot fathom," is the general verdict of most of these—"what is it? In the meanwhile, what we do find is mostly nonsense."

These men have "called" to them the spirits of great men of the past. Shakespeare, Mary Stuart, Balzac, Zola, Voltaire, Julius Cæsar, Alexander the Great, and many more—the list might be indefinitely prolonged—have shown a disconcerting readiness immediately to *answer invitations to come and "manifest" themselves*, "no matter where in space they might be or whatever else they were doing," and, *always speaking in French*, to show that in their spiritual incarnations, they had lost any minds they had on earth, for what they had to say was *in all cases mere stupidity*. Nobody was for a moment deceived by the "spirit drawing" that was revealed to Sardou of "*Mozart's house in the planet Jupiter!*" "I know a University professor," writes one French critic, "who will not leave *Socrates* in peace for twenty-four hours, but when he appears the philosopher's observations are about on the level of those of a second class able seaman."

Jules Claretie, in an account of one of the séances to which he went, gave a pathetic but bitter picture of the manner in which sensitive, sorrowing souls are duped:

I remember a sort of Niobe in black with a battered hat

on her white hair, who was watching, with a greedy eye and an expression of ecstasy that was infinitely touching . . . the gyrations of a table on which they had told her the soul of her dead son was passing and agitating it.

"Her lost son—her dead child was there! Truth or lie, the phenomenon gave the poor old woman, it cannot be denied, a consoling illusion and joy! . . .

"Suddenly one of the organisers of the meeting (I shall not name him, though his name has since become famous) came to this mother with her eyes full of tears.

"'Madame,' he asked, 'would you like to keep your son's replies?'

"They were replies like this, 'Are you happy?'—'Quite.' 'Where are you now?'—'In heaven.' 'Are you comfortable?'—'Very.' 'Are you sorry you left the earth?'—'No, not at all.' 'Have you anything to say to anyone?'—'No.' 'Do you send me your love?'—'Yes.'

"Did the poor woman wish to preserve this precious dialogue with her dead son? . . .

"A moment later they gave her a slip of paper, 'Here, madame.' And as she seized it with shaking hands, read and re-read it, and then pressed it feverishly and piously to her lips, the organiser added with a smile,

"That will be five francs, madame!"

Dr. Lapponi, the distinguished physician to two Popes—Leo XIII and Pius X—while deploring and condemning the use of hypnotism wrote:—

Spiritualism presents all the same dangers and evil consequences for society and the individual as hypnotism, and a great many more besides. In exchange it offers no advantages, unless it be the advantage, though a very poor

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one, of indirectly showing the existence of the supernatural—of *which even we have no manifest proofs!* . . . For those who play the rôles of medium and for those taking part in experiments, spiritualism results in a morbid exaltation of the mental faculties and produces grave neuropathic tendencies. It is a well-known fact that most of the famous mediums and many of those who have taken part in spiritualistic practices have died mad or the victims of serious nervous ailment.

We have another scientific opinion in that of Professor G. M. Robertson, physician superintendent of the Royal Edinburgh Medical Hospital and a distinguished mental expert, who says, "I do not consider either Sir A. Conan Doyle or Sir Oliver Lodge to be safe judges whose opinions should be accepted on this difficult and important subject, in view of their bereavement and their unconscious desires. The tricks the brain can play without calling in spiritualistic aid are simply astounding."

Again, Professor Jastrow, the well-known psychologist of the University of Wisconsin, confesses himself to be puzzled over the tendency of some fellow scientists to accept a belief which, he says, *has certainly not yet been proved.* And it is a fact to be noted that in the United States there are no really eminent men supporting the views set forth in spiritualism by distinguished British scientists and writers.

Dr. Jastrow seeks to combat the rising tide of belief in the occult, and scientifically to discredit such accessories as the Ouija board, the crystal ball, planchette, spirit photography and automatic writing. He maintains that, apart from fraud,

the mystery which *seems* to envelop so-called psychical manifestations is no mystery at all. He says:—

Spirit manifestations are traceable to reactions of the sub-conscious mind in highly keyed and nervous personalities. The underlying cause of so-called dual personality, trances, spirit-writing, is the same—the singular operation of the sub-conscious mind. One of the reasons why so many people come to believe in spiritualism is the personal nature of the communications they *believe they receive* from departed loved ones. But they do not understand the subtleties often employed by mediums, the fishing carried on by means of cleverly disguised leading questions, the keen observation employed, and perhaps by means of little understood, intangible processes of the mind which seem supernatural.

This authority adds that he has watched a good many mediums go into trances, but *has never seen the slightest proof of spirit contact*. “The mediums babbled and murmured just as people ordinarily talk in their sleep.” He believes automatic writing to be mere hallucination, and dual personality child’s pretending. Persons with so-called dual personality permit it to become a dominating delusion.

Dr. Jastrow adds that the after-life can neither be proved nor disproved by science. *Science knows no proof as yet of the supernatural*. He warns against fraud and denounces spiritualism as a clever piece of trickery.

Even, however, if we do not go so far as this, condemning all these manifestations wholesale, we are inevitably driven back to ask the question, what is the good of it all?

Since the war the craze for spiritualism seems to have grown by leaps and bounds—it is the natural reaction against grief

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and the tensivity of the feelings of that time, or the result of "nerves."

But we must remember that such popular crazes are by no means novel. Far away back in history and pre-history, we find the love of the supernatural haunting the human mind. In Egypt, Greece, Imperial Rome, and in the middle ages, there existed the sorcerer who pretended to bring spirits back to commune with mortals, thus spreading hope and arousing terror. Those for whom simple faith is not sufficient have always more or less given themselves up to this sort of necromancy. The subjects of the tyrants Caligula and Nero sought for the secrets of the past and future in sacrilegious sorceries; in the dark ages witchcraft and Satanism played their sinister rôle and drove many thousands crazy; in the last century fashionable dames and inquiring minds gathered round Mesmer's tub or the table of Cagliostro. Home and Dunglass, of the Court of the Tuilleries, Miss Houghton, with her "spirit photographs" last century; Allan Kardeck; Anne Rothe, the Berlin medium, who ended her table-turning in prison; Slade, the American; Eusepia Palladino—the list is a very long one, and on looking back we find that few of them have escaped being exposed, if not of active fraud, at any rate of serious delusion and trickery of a sort on others.

It is the eternal desire of the human mind to escape from the reality of things, which manifests itself all the more in days when life is threatened and existence is precarious.

At times this desire to get into touch with loved ones who have passed from our vision is pathetic and touching. Look at that bereaved mother with her eyes streaming as she leans

over the table hoping that this material thing will reveal to her the secrets of eternity.

"Would you," ask some sympathetic observers, "destroy faith like this, which brings a measure of comfort and solace to the afflicted?"

In other words, should one encourage a "faith" which is falsehood based on delusion if not on trickery? No! Because belief in the chimerical *is an offence to the dignity of human nature*. The craze for the supernatural deprives its "adepts" of the proper sense of responsibility and the desire for active struggle in the domain of reality, even if it does not bring worse results, as we have seen that in many cases it does.

And let us not forget that the books that have been written about the "life hereafter" have, *not to put too fine a point on it*, been made to sell! They may sub-consciously have had as one motive the bringing of comfort to the sorrowing relatives of those who have died in the flower of their youth, but unfortunately they are all too much tainted with the modern spirit of commercialism. Behind the assurances of future life, there lurks the fat cheque in this life, and the golden sunrise of the hereafter is overshadowed by the publisher's advertisement.

And when all is said and done, they contain not a line or phrase that can convince cultivated people as to the truth of their revelations. "The author of 'Raymond' and the writings of Vale Owen," says that shrewd observer, Dr. Schofield, "have done more to discredit their originators than anything else they have done in the domain of spiritualism." He is satisfied that the supposed "messages" are only



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messages from the sub-conscious brain of the inquirer received by the medium in a state of trance. Memory, it is well known, plays the strangest tricks upon the mind, and those who profess or believe that they have recognised the voices of dead friends or relatives have but to make one very simple experiment—try to remember the exact timbre and resonance of a voice that has been still for a year, or a few months even. Interesting as is Sir George Kekewich's relation of the vision of his sister, related in another chapter, what reliance can one place upon this without knowing what was the nervous or physiological condition of the sister who told him the story? So it is with the others. From what hypnotic suggestions were they suffering?

"Let us glance," writes a recent French critic, "at the most satisfactory among the experiments that have been made—those of Crookes with Hume, those of Aksakof with Eglinton, those of the late Prof. Alfred Russell Wallace. Let us read the accounts, and we realise how many objections there are to be made—there is not a line that does not make one incredulously shrug one's shoulders. You can show me the portrait of the spirit Abdullah or the portrait of the spirit Katie King; you may make me touch the form of a cold 'spiritual' hand which is nevertheless material during a séance; but at every step one meets with mystification and humbug. And what becomes of the photographs of spirits? Nothing—less than nothing, for we cannot be satisfied with something that is nearly "it." We must have something that is irreproachable."

In short, the more one learns of spiritualists the more one becomes convinced that they are self-deluded people, some

for one reason, some for another, many for mere pecuniary reasons, many from sheer vanity and desire of notoriety, anxious as they are to take part in a public movement in which a misguided celebrated person may happen to take an interest.

"One resents not only the distraction of human effort," says a recent newspaper writer, "but the encouragement to fraudulent mediums all over England to prey on the sentiments of the bereaved which merit respectful silence."

"The only good that I can see in the demonstration of 'spiritualism' is to furnish an additional argument against suicide. Better live a crossing-sweeper than die and be made to talk twaddle by a 'medium' hired at a guinea a séance," wrote Thomas Henry Huxley.

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